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COMMERCIALISM AND ROMAN TERRITORIAL EXPANSION

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It is a commonplace of prefaces that historians often reflect the spirit of their own epoch in the interpretation of past ages. A review of the successive efforts at writing the history of Rome would itself furnish a picture of the changing *Zeitgeist* in the countries of the writers. It lay in the nature of things, then, that the most recent survey of Roman history should be made from the viewpoint of economics. This new tendency of interpreting history in the light of economic theory has brought forth many permanent collections of interesting data; it has resulted in substantial gains in the methods of historical research; but it has also created many extravagant claims which time will have to disprove. Ferrero, if I may be so rude as to illustrate by definite reference, seems at times almost to set up skirmishing lines of economic phantasms which dash about and clash at a most bewildering rate. If the page threatens to become dull for a moment, up springs a "panic" or a "crop failure" or a "plethora of gold" or a "wave of land speculation," any one of which will immediately stir the musty history into fascinating activity. Now, it is easy to make strictures upon this method of work, and one would not like to be called upon to weigh the value of it in literal language. In dealing with ancient history where the data are so incomplete, often so one-sided, often so naïvely disconnected with fundamental movements, the opportunities for new interpretations are limitless. Perhaps one ought to welcome the peculiar interpretation of each successive age for the modicum of new suggestions that it offers, or, at least, for the ease with which it can be comprehended by the age that produced it. These interpretations, however, must not wander too far from established facts.

I shall deal here with a now popular explanation for Rome's foreign expansion. The extremists of the economic school find the main-

spring of Rome's extension beyond Italy in such things as a desire for new markets, new harbors, new fields for commercial activity—briefly, in commercialism. It is not surprising that the student of modern conditions should be attracted by such explanations. The picture of England, the greatest of modern imperialistic nations, seems to afford a fair parallel. And in England imperialism is inseparably bound up with commercialism. It is largely responsible for the stupendous budget of over seven hundred millions of dollars. It affords a thriving business to a dozen shipbuilding firms with their thousands of workmen, to scores of factories that fill military contracts for arms, ammunition, and uniforms. In the British empire "trade follows the flag": England's cotton and woolen mills spin for the shops of all her dominion; the firms of Sheffield and Birmingham work night and day upon the steel rails and the engines that are to carry English merchandise over the empire. An area of 120,000 square miles with 40,000,000 inhabitants is but the commercial heart of an empire of 12,000,000 square miles with a population of 400,000,000 people.

The historian, however, must not be led astray by incomplete parallels. His first duty is to exert every possible effort to reconstruct his building from the fragments of the original that are left him. And I think that anyone who will make a patient study of Roman commercial conditions in the second century B. C. will be led to the conclusion we here reach: that the commercial classes of Rome could have had very little influence in shaping the policy of expansion at Rome.

Mommsen was one of the first to make a suggestion to the contrary. He believed that it was the mercantile party which urged the destruction of Corinth and Carthage (English ed.², Vol. III, pp. 239, 274). These suggestions quickly found favor, and were so widely extended in application that it has become the favorite explanation for every war of the second century B. C. A few typical references will suffice. Colin (*Rome et la Grèce*) insists that the second and third Macedonian wars were strongly favored by the commercial classes; Van Gelder in his history of Rhodes asserts with many others that the abasement of Rhodes after the third Macedonian war resulted from the exertions of Roman traders; and Homolle (*Bulletin de correspondance hellénique*, VIII, p. 78) and Dessau (*Hermes*, XVIII, p. 156) both believe that

Rome's treatment of Delos in 166 was in accordance with the requests of Roman merchants interested in Delian commerce.

Now, it is obviously difficult to control the data by which to examine these theories. Roman historians usually deal with accomplished political facts, adding here and there a moral judgment. For political motive and theory they have little concern, and for economic problems, even less. Excavations, however, particularly those in the eastern Mediterranean, are yielding definite knowledge regarding the history of Roman commerce during the second century B. C. There is enough of this data at hand now for a re-examination of the theories that I have mentioned. Without attempting a discussion of all the evidence, which would of course be impossible, I shall briefly review the most important part of it, and indicate its bearing upon the problem at hand.

The French school, as is well known, has for a score of years been excavating the ruins of Delos with excellent results. No place could have yielded better material for the history of Roman commerce than this island. We know from Strabo (x. 486) that Delos, because of its good harbor and its convenient situation between the province of Asia and Rome, became the favorite resort of Roman merchants in the Aegean. Obviously, with such a statement at hand our historians would be quick to connect changes in the political history of Delos with the progress of Roman commerce in the east, and, by inference, with Roman political influence in the east. Let us examine the facts as we know them.

It will be remembered that during the third century B. C., Delos¹ was an independent democracy with some seven hundred free citizens, mainly connected with her numerous temples. In 196, while the Romans were settling affairs in Greece after the second Macedonian war, Athens desired to take possession of the island, but was apparently opposed by Rome. During the third Macedonian war, Delos was friendly to Macedonia, and seems, in fact, to have been a Macedonian protectorate for a while (*B. C. H.*, XXXII, p. 110). When,

¹ Schoeffer gives an excellent sketch of the history of Delos in Pauly-Wissowa, IV, 2460 ff. See the same article for bibliography. A quarter of a century ago, Homolle wrote an article on "Les romains à Délos" (*B. C. H.*, VIII, pp. 75 ff.). This was excellently done, but later excavations have added much important material, which does not always support his somewhat radical conclusions.

therefore, after the defeat of Perseus, Athens asked Rome to grant her old claims to the island, Rome gave permission but stipulated that Delos be made a free port. The Athenians took charge of the offices, and finally, with the permission of Rome, deported the Delians to Achaea. The Athenians at Delos now formed a democratic government responsible to the home city. About 130 this intermediate government seems to have passed away. In 88, when Athens declared for the conquering Mithradates, Delos refused to join her, and in consequence was sacked by the Pontic general who killed some 20,000 inhabitants. Delos never recovered from this devastation.

What chiefly concerns us in this account is Rome's action in giving Delos to Athens in 166 and requiring it to be made a free port. The obvious explanation for this action is that Rome by the gift of Delos could mete out fair punishment to the island for its friendship for Macedonia, while at the same time satisfying Athenian claims and sparing herself the necessity of governing foreign territory. Furthermore, it would hardly have been fair for Athens to enrich herself by levying port dues at Delos—a sacred island, famed principally as a pilgrims' shrine. Rome's disposition of Delos was therefore the natural one.

Now the explanation for this act as found in our historians is that the senate made Delos a free port at the requests of the merchants who were trading there. This is where the inscriptions of Delos must be called into service. Of the 2,000 or more inscriptions which have been found on the island some 300 bear Roman and Italian names. Most of these come from the great period of Roman influence, about 110–90 B. C., that is, some twenty years after the creation of the province of Asia—and before the massacre of Mithradates in 88. For the years preceding 150 the evidences of a Roman mercantile class are extremely meager. To gain a fair presentation of this evidence let us compare the famous list of *proxeni* of Delphi with the temple decrees and inventories of Delos for this same period, noting the number of Romans and non-Romans honored at each place. Delphi, of course, was wholly a religious shrine, entirely out of the channels of commerce, whereas Delos lay in the way of the Aegean merchant and particularly of the Roman merchant. In looking over the list of *proxeni* of Delphi (Ditt. 268), one is first surprised at the cosmopolitan character of the list, and then at the comparative scarcity of Roman

names. The list extends from 197 to 170, the very years when Roman armies and Roman embassies, the friends and benefactors of Delphi, were constantly passing through. Three Roman generals are as a matter of course honored by the city. But apart from these (and a few pseudo-Roman Sicilians and southern Italians) there is but one Roman (Veturius, 95) in the list, and he may well be a general or an envoy. In view of the large number of persons from Marseilles, Alexandria, Byzantium, and other distant places, the scarcity of Roman names is surprising.

The situation at Delos is very much the same. Six Roman generals deposited offerings at the shrine of Apollo during the wars with Philip and Antiochus (Demares' list, *B. C. H.*, VI, pp. 29 ff.), but, considering that the Roman fleet was constantly harboring at Delos during the several wars in the east, it is remarkable that so few other Roman names appear. In this list of Demares, Lucius and Titius are probably officials, Minatos (l. 147)¹ is a citizen of Cumae, and Vibius (130) and Oppius (148) are apparently also from the Greco-Oscan end of Italy. Timon of Syracuse and Sextius of Fregella who appear among the *proxeni* of about 180 are not Romans (*B. C. H.*, VIII, p. 89). Trebius Loesius of about 150 seems to be a Sicilian (Mommsen, *C. I. L.*, X, p. 999). The unknown man of Canusium (*B. C. H.*, VIII, p. 81; about 240 B. C.), was, like the men just mentioned, connected with the Greek commerce of southern Italy rather than with any Roman mercantile society that could exert its influence upon the policies of the senate. There are left a very few names: a Quintus Plinius (?) (Demares, 148), and a freedman of an Aulus (*ibid.*, 62) who may or may not represent Roman business men prior to 150 B. C.² The presence of these few Roman names on the tablets of Delos furnishes no more evidence of a strong commercial influence in the Aegean than the presence of the name of my patient reader upon the register of Trinity church in Stratford foretells a future American invasion of England.

When Delos was made a free port in 166, commerce was naturally attracted to the island. The Rhodians soon claimed that they were

It is probably this Minatos who is mentioned in an inventory of about 220 B. C. Cf. *B. C. H.*, XXXII, p. 81.

² For a possible addition to this list see *B. C. H.*, XXXII, p. 81.

losing trade and prestige thereby.¹ Part of this loss was due to the fact that after the Delians were deported, Syrian and Egyptian traders made their home in Delos, abandoning Rhodes. The character of the Delian population now became remarkably cosmopolitan. The city grew rapidly with its new advantages and, perhaps, even faster after Corinth with its vigorous commerce was destroyed. But Delian commerce still remained overwhelmingly eastern in its character. This is conclusively proved by the inscriptions. Syrian cults had entered the island in the early part of the second century (*B. C. H.*, VI, pp. 295 ff.), and Syrian mercantile associations grew in number from 160 on. *C. I. G.*, 2271, is an important decree of the "Synod of Tyrian merchants" dating from 153, while Roussel, *B.C. H.*, 1907, gives a collection of inscriptions of the merchants' association (Poseidonists) of Beyrout, Syria, dating from about 125 on. Egyptians entered Delos as early. The association of Melanophoroi can be traced back to about 160 (*B. C. H.*, VIII, pp. 104 ff.) while the Serapeum has a great many inscriptions from 135 on. (Cf. Hauvette-Besnault, *B. C. H.*, VI, pp. 316 ff.) Other tablets recording honors and gifts show an influx of easterners about the middle of the century. The cities most frequently represented are Alexandria, Antioch, Tyre, Sidon, Beyrout, Heracleia, and other cities of the Pontus, Aradus, Ascalon, and Laodicea. These are the people in Delos who gained most effectually by the creation of the free port and the fall of Corinth. Roman names still remain among the rarities. In fact, the influx of the Roman traders dates not from 166 (the creation of the free port) nor from 146 (the fall of Corinth) but from 129 when the inheritance of the kingdom of Pergamum turned the attention of Roman business men to the east. From that time Delos became the regular way-station between Asia and Rome. The Roman merchant entered the eastern field with the Asiatic tax-gatherer who took tithes in kind. Delos naturally became the port of exchange for such products and thereby fell quite definitely under Roman sway.

The Roman traders formed their own conventus or club (the Mercuriales) which we can date back at least to 126 B. C. (*C. I. G.*,

¹ The port dues fell off some 150,000 drachmas in five years, they said. Naturally much of this decrease resulted from the war in Macedonia and the loss of trade in Caria and Lydia. The Rhodians also knew how to make a plea as strong as possible, regardless of exactitude.

2286).¹ Their temple to Hermes seems to have been built about that time. Somewhat later the freedmen and slaves formed a society for the worship of the lares compitales, leaving a generous record of their piety which dates back to about 100-90 (*B. C. H.*, XXIII). An indication of the extent of Roman commerce and the diversity of interests is found in the fact that there are separate associations of Roman olearii and chrysopoli as early as 90 B. C. (*B. C. H.*, XXIII).

It is from this time (about 120-90) that most of the Roman inscriptions of Delos date, and it is at about this time that the large Roman clubhouse (*Schola Romanorum*), the largest building in Delos, was erected.

The phraseology of the public inscriptions is particularly serviceable in indicating the growing power of the Romans. Their usefulness for this purpose is due to a peculiar circumstance. As Ferguson has shown (*Klio*, VII, pp. 234 ff.) there was a radical political change in Delos about 130-127 which put an end to the rule of the Delio-Athenian democracy then governing. The public decrees that follow in 126 are issued apparently not by a formal government, but by an aggregate of "Athenians who dwell in Delos and of merchants and traders, be they Romans or other strangers who dwell in the island." The special mention of the Romans is sure proof of their presence on the island at this time, although, of course, they would receive this honor because of the prestige of their nation in the east even if their numbers were not large. However, the growing predominance of the Romans, especially in the years 110-90 is shown unmistakably by the constant change in the phraseology of these public inscriptions whereby the Romans gradually assume the place of importance. This fact may be illustrated by the following examples² placed in chronological order:

¹ Dedications to Hermes and Maia found in *B. C. H.*, I, p. 284, and XXIII, p. 57, may possibly be older. They are undated, however, and we do not know how much allowance to make for provincial conservatism in the spelling. Inscriptions of other eastern cities reveal a number of Roman commercial clubs about the middle of the first century. Argos, for example, seems to have had a strong *conventus* of Roman traders about the year 69 (*C. I. L.*, III, pp. 531, 532). Beroea in Macedonia had Roman traders in 57, Lesbos in 31 (*C. I. L.*, III, p. 455; see Pauly-Wissowa under "*conventus*"). These inscriptions, however, are so late that they only add to our skepticism in regard to the supposed Roman commerce of the second century.

² I have chosen these from the list given by Ferguson, *ad loc. cit.*, p. 236.

1. Ἀθηναίων οἱ κατοικοῦντες ἐν Δήλῳ καὶ οἱ ἔμποροι καὶ οἱ ναύκληροι καὶ Ῥωμαίων καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ξένων οἱ παρεπιδημοῦντες (126/5 B. C.).

2. Ἀθηναίων καὶ Ῥωμαίων καὶ τῶν ἄλλων Ἑλλήνων οἱ κατοικοῦντες τὴν νήσον (110/9 B. C.).

3. Ἴταλοὶ καὶ Ἑλληνες (102/1 B. C.).

4. Italicei et Graeci quaei Delei negotiantur (about 80 B. C.).

Here, then, are definite facts regarding the history of Roman commerce in the east, facts that will aid in the interpretation of Rome's governmental policies. We must admit that the evidence does not cover the whole question. It dates the arrival of the Roman merchant in the east without giving any positive information as to whether the senate purposely opened the field for commerce, or whether the Roman merchant exerted any influence upon the foreign policies of the senate in order to find new commerce for himself. When we remember, however, that in the west also Rome was slow to enter the shipping trade, and again that the evidence for a strong commercial lobby in the senate is not supported by any good ancient authority, we must, I think, give a straightforward and conservative interpretation of the inscriptions.

So far as these inscriptions are concerned, then, we are justified in saying that the development of Roman commerce in the east is somewhat later than we had supposed, that we have little reason for asserting that there were Romans at Delos in 167 who had the power to ask for its conversion into a free port, and finally that we are very far from proving that the Roman colony in Delos was strong enough to ask for the destruction of Corinth. In short, the evidence of these inscriptions tends to disprove all statements to the effect that the eastern commerce of Rome was extensive enough to influence Rome's governmental policies before the time of the Gracchi. All we are justified in saying is that some Italian merchants connected with the Greek commerce of southern Italy left record of themselves in Delos in the first half of the second century. A few Romans on official business of the state also appear on the records. But no considerable number of Roman merchants seems to have entered the Delian trade until about the time when the acceptance of Pergamum as a Roman province brought the Roman trader into the east.

These conclusions will not seem startling to students of Roman civilization. They are supported by all that we know about the temperament and customs of the Romans. A state that would prohibit its nobility from engaging in the carrying trade could hardly be called a commercial nation. Cicero aptly expresses the conviction of the nation on this point when he says: "nolo eundem populum imperatorem et portitorem esse terrarum" (*Rep.* 4, 7).

This attitude of the nation toward commerce was not a matter of mere sentiment. It had its practical reasons. Rome never was a manufacturing city, nor did Italy ever produce a surplus of grain for export. The balance of trade, in fact, was always against Rome. Now, a nation of no exports will hardly be an aggressive carrying nation unless the task of carrying its own food supply be thrust upon it. It was only when the commercial cities like Alexandria, and the cities of Rhodes and Syria dwindled into insignificance that the Romans had to come to the rescue of their own shipping—and not until then. The real wealth of Rome lay in what we might call banking and brokerage. The banker extends his business by peaceful methods. He is too conservative and too fearful of dangerous ventures to advocate a policy of aggrandizement. This fact must be borne in mind in attempting to explain the probable policy of the moneyed man of Rome.

How very negligent of her commercial opportunities Rome really was, may be gathered from the specifications of her treaties. It will be found that they differ markedly from the Greek and Carthaginian treaties which never fail to make careful provisions for commercial advantages. Agrarian influence is much more apt to be present, as, for example, in the treaty with the Gauls of the Po in 154 (*Rep.* 3, 16) where the culture of the vine and olive is expressly forbidden. Contrast with this measure the senate's neglect of the confiscated royal mines in Macedonia in 167. These mines might have proved enormously lucrative to the mercantile class if the senate had been concerned with that class. The truth of the matter is that the commercial spirit seems to have been dormant in Rome at this period.

There are several other pieces of evidence that point to this same conclusion. I would refer to the many facts that prove the Romans to have been averse to seamanship. For instance, almost all the parts

of a Roman vessel, except those belonging to a very simply constructed boat, have Greek names. Polybius' stories of the making of fleets during the Punic wars show how awkward the Romans were in the matter. These fleets were not kept up. The Greeks of southern Italy were usually relied upon to furnish vessels and crews in time of need, and were accordingly called the *socii navales*. During the wars in the east Rhodes and Pergamum fought most of the naval battles for Rome. Even Sulla and Lucullus had to have their fleets built on the shores of Asia. Rome had none. She might at least have saved the captured navies of Macedonia and Syria, either for a Roman navy or for the use of Roman merchants, but she burned them. During the social war the state employed sea-captains from Miletus, Klazomene, and other eastern cities. A state which has a large foreign commerce would hardly show so many failures in the matter of seaman-ship.

Rome's failure to improve the harbor at Ostia during the Republic provides further evidence of the same nature. It is difficult to comprehend how the Romans could have been satisfied with a harbor over a hundred miles away (Puteoli) if their foreign commerce amounted to anything. Even Puteoli seems to have grown very slowly. Lucilius called it the "little Delos," and Delos at best had only 20,000 inhabitants and a comparatively petty harbor of 300 meters. The history of Cretan and Cilician piracy also shows how little real interest the government at Rome felt in the shipping in the Aegean even as late as 70 B. C. To these facts one may add a valid *argument ex silentio* from Polybius, a contemporary. In the sixth book Polybius gives a very full (even an exaggerated) account of the ramifications of interests in Roman public contracts (buildings, roads, revenue, etc.) but nowhere does he seem to be aware of any extensive commerce. Cicero, speaking about a hundred years later in favor of the financial interests of the east, leaves the same impression. He does not say: "Our merchants depend upon the commerce of Asia," but only: "Roman money is invested in the revenue-collecting of Asia."

Now, it was in connection with the province of Asia that the rich man became a power in Roman politics. The senate had accepted the bequest of Attalus in 129, but, with its habitual conservatism and disregard of financial interests, had cut it down to a very small prov-

ince and had imposed but slight burdens of taxation upon it. This arrangement continued until 122 when the younger Gracchus changed the system of taxation for political reasons. When the younger Gracchus formed his combination of the poor and the rich against the "nobility," his bribe to the rich was the privilege of farming the Asiatic tax. The significant fact for us in this legislation is the manner by which the wealthy man was bought. It was by extending his banking privileges, not by extending Roman territory for his commerce nor by gaining for him new commercial fields or rights. The date and the method of procedure are both of unusual importance for the problem at hand, for I think it safe to say that not until the Gracchan period had the senate given its attention to the question of commerce in determining the fate of the nations which it conquered.

The purpose of this paper has simply been to show how unreasonable is the oft-repeated statement that Rome's territorial expansion was largely a result of commercial forces. What actually invited Rome beyond the sea is another question, a question far too intricate to be solved in a sentence or a page. Many elements undoubtedly entered into it. In part it may have been a national expression of the instinct that reveals itself in the individual as the desire to acquire and possess; if so, I am convinced that it was for the most part unconscious, and had not particularized itself into a definite wish for land and harbors. Philhellenism entered into the statesmanship of men like Flamininus. Conservative, shrewd farmers like Cato, on the other hand, acted on the principle that the future safety of Italy must be assured against the inroads of adventurous and unscrupulous neighbors. The nation as a whole, legal-minded and law-abiding as it was, was usually ready to heed a call to reorganize a lawless or a misruled people. Sometimes the bonds of alliance, always very sacred to Rome, drew the state into wars beyond the border which, in time, resulted in expansion. Again, the ambition of consuls forced the senate to undertake expeditions that could not easily be justified by seemly excuses. The motives and pretexts for Rome's expansion beyond Italy were various.

They even changed from decade to decade. The Greek of 146 was not treated like the Greek of 196, nor was the Athenian placed on the same plane as the Spaniard. It seems that the individual

senators, like Cato, Flaminius, and Paulus, who from time to time wielded the greatest influence, were in no small degree opportunists, possessors of respectable ideals, but probably not of a far-reaching foreign policy. And yet with all this variety of motives and with all the changes in the personnel of the senate, there is a certain hidden unity of purpose and ideal in the sum of the senate's endeavors to control the manner of imperial expansion.

Perhaps this may be illustrated by way of contrast. In the oriental theocracy national expansion was synonymous with religious conquest. It became an unquestioned necessity. Perhaps the instinct of acquisition—expressed by national methods—disguised itself most conveniently under religious garb. Even today, national expansion is prone to cant about “manifest destiny” and “a chosen people.” In recent years we have seen a simultaneous expression of the theocratic ideal with that of the commercial in one and the same nation. While a kaiser spoke of “manifest destiny,” his chancellor was calling for *Realpolitik*, and both, working in perfect unison, were ready to assert that sentiment and individual ethics had no place in questions of national expansion. The Roman senate had at least gotten beyond the theocratic stage by the year 200. It could discuss each individual case on its own merits, and it could resist the temptation to devour the conquered under the pretext of pleasing heaven. Nor—and this has been my main contention—was the senate lost in the slough of *Realpolitik*. It could be stirred by an appeal, even a foolish appeal, to go out of its way to secure freedom and stable government throughout Greece and Asia Minor. Even the crabbed Cato was capable of mixing a bit of sentiment with his strict appeals to justice. There is a great deal of truth in Polybius' statement that the Roman senate was extremely sensitive to the good opinion of the civilized world, being careful not to enter a war without justification in the eyes of other nations. In conclusion, then, we may say that though the Rome of Cato's day had gotten beyond the oriental idea of identifying national bigness with theocratic success, she had not reached the more modern policy of transforming it into commercial success; and that beneath all the groping of her opportunist statesmen, we can consistently trace a thoroughly Roman endeavor to extend the domain of law, order, and justice.